

Why Was I So Trusting?

By Lt. Ingrid Müller

We were in the Northern Arabian Gulf, flying our daily, middle-of-the-night SSC and MIO mission. We arrived on station, identified the contacts in the area, reviewed the Hellfire checklist, and began our continuous-circle search for suspicious contacts. Mostly though, we kept busy and stayed awake by telling each other stories.

The pilot, my OinC, had just finished telling a crazy story about the time he almost crashed an aircraft in his 2P days. Back when there weren't daily flight briefs, ORM, pre-flights, CRM, etc. I mean, way back in the olden days.

After looking at him, and realizing just how old he really was, I started to think about all the checks and balances we have today to prevent those near-misses. I thought, regardless of all these checks and balances, I never would make a decision to put me in that kind of danger. Hmmm...but there was that time back in flight school before we implemented ORM. I guess flying with instructors was so safe, we didn't need ORM.

It was my turn to tell the rest of the crew a story. It happened in T-34s, at Corpus Christi, Texas. I was a scared little ensign who believed all my instructors were gods and knew everything there was to know about flying. I trusted them wholeheartedly. I usually trusted few people, but flying was so foreign and intimidating to me, I needed to believe the other person in the cockpit really knew what they were doing.

I was in the visual and instrument navigation flight (VNAV and INAV) syllabus in intermediates phase, that stage in the flight program where I wasn't a scheduling priority. Each day, I would wait for an instructor to pick me for a flight. There were few instructors, and they were too busy getting students through primary. However, one fateful day my old on-wing returned.

He had been assigned a new on-wing but had just finished delivering a ready-room down and sent his new protégé home. He decided to pick me up for a VNAV. Did I mention earlier this guy swore at me continuously throughout our flights together? He was a jerk, but I trusted him.

He decided we would fly to Houston, have dinner, and fly back. The weather forecaster told us a huge line of thunderstorms was moving in from the west, and it would hit us on our return flight. My instructor decided it would not hit us.

I thought, "Well, he's been doing this for years, so he must know." Of course, that was utter stupidity on my part. I don't remember his telling me he majored in meteorology in school, so how would he know more than the forecaster? I trusted him.

We arrived in Houston and called safe-on-deck to our squadron. We should have checked the weather again, anticipating the arrival of a storm, but instead, we took an hour to eat. This decision was made so matter-of-factly by the instructor; I didn't foresee any trouble.

We checked the weather on our return to the airport and found it was still rolling in. So he decided we'd do an INAV back, and I figured, OK, no big deal. However it did mess up my training syllabus. It was going to be tough to

ORM Corner

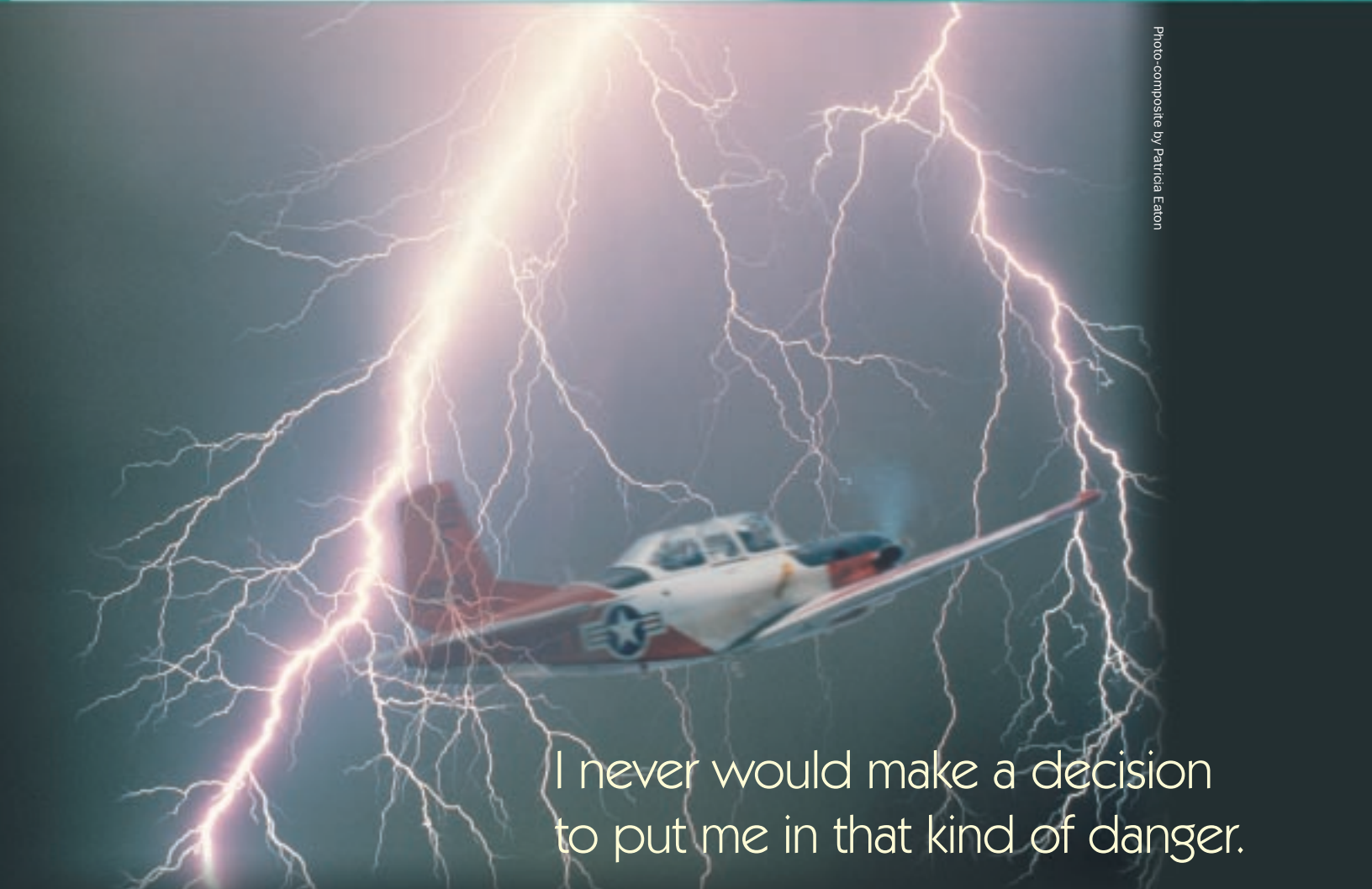
Please send your questions, comments or recommendations to Ted Wirginis or to Capt. Denis M. Faherty, Director Operational Risk Management.

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Photo-composite by Patricia Eaton



I never would make a decision
to put me in that kind of danger.

get a single VNAV and a single INAV flight scheduled again. I'd worry about it later. I gave no thought to the flight ahead.

We filed a flight plan and took off. Halfway to Corpus, the weather turned bad. First we were flying airways, and it still was clear, then clouds rolled in. But, hey, I had completed BIs: I just focused on the instruments.

It suddenly wasn't just a matter of being on instruments; we started getting wind shears and horrible turbulence. Lightning was all around the aircraft. The plane wouldn't stay steady. My instructor told me I'd done a good job, and he was giving me credit for the flight, but he

would fly the rest of the way back. No problem I thought, and the plane was all his.

As we approached home, the weather progressively got worse. We heard on the radios that our field was closed. Great! Now we had to go to a civilian international airport, and quickly, because they probably were about to close. Why did my instructor keep banking to 60 degrees left and right? It was like he read my mind. "I'm not banking this way on purpose; it's the wind shears. I have vertigo. You have the controls," he blurts out.

Ahhh! I took the controls, while thinking, "If he has vertigo, how am I going to make it

through this?” I was a year away from my instrument rating. The wind shears were bad, but I just concentrated on the instruments ahead of me—when I could focus on them. The plane was all over the place, shaking so much it was tough to see the gauges. But I hung on.

We miraculously made progress toward the airport, and, after some gut-wrenching moments, my instructor was able to take the controls again. We made it to the airport in one piece. We landed, shut down and secured the aircraft. I didn’t have any idea of what just had happened. I just was extremely frustrated because my car was parked at the other airfield.


The next day, I told other students about what had happened, and they agreed it was a bad flight, but nobody really comprehended what happened. I just only realized it, four years later, when I was telling this story to my boss in the middle of the night.

Why had I been so trusting? I should have said, “No thanks, I don’t want to fly in this weather; I don’t

think it’s a good idea. Let’s do it tomorrow.” But I didn’t. Instructors taught us to speak up about safety no matter what rank the other person is, but I just didn’t realize the severity of the situation.

I had gone through flight school in Corpus Christi in the summertime, and the storms were the first I had seen since arriving. I also trusted my instructor completely. I have no idea why; I was just so inexperienced at the time, and I thought everyone knew more. I’ve learned to speak up when something is questionable. That’s what ORM is all about.

ORM is a process that works. It’s for salty aviators as well as those still wet behind the ears. It’s for everybody, all the time, and it shouldn’t take a sea story to remind you to use it. My old on-wing would be the first to tell you he’s capable of killing someone.

Are you? 

Lt. Müller flies with HSL-48.

I Want to Be a Navy Pilot

By a fifth grader

I want to be a Navy pilot when I grow up because it’s fun and easy to do.

Pilots don’t need much school, they just have to learn numbers so they can read instruments.

I guess they should be able to read maps so they can find their way if they are lost.

Pilots should be brave so they won’t be scared if it’s foggy and they can’t see. If a wing or a motor falls off, they should stay calm so they’ll know what to do.

Pilots need to have good eyes so they can see through clouds and they can’t be afraid of lightning or thunder because they are closer to them than we are.

The salary pilots make is another thing I like; they make more money than they can spend. This is because most people think airplane flying is dangerous, except pilots don’t, because they know how easy it is.